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ABSTRACT

Common variables that can be isolated to explain mergers of academic units within universities were investigated, along with variables associated with the potential and actual benefits of the mergers as perceived by faculty and administrators. Central tendencies were used to compute the similarities and differences in the external and internal environmental conditions before and after the mergers. The external conditions were defined as exogenous variables beyond the direct control of the university administrators and consisted of student demand for programs and directives from governing/coordinating boards. Internal variables were controllable by the administration. Similarities in the political and educational conditions prior to the mergers were found. The single most common impetus for merger was the economic condition of the units. The process of merger was similar among the participating institutions, and the mergers resulted in a more centralized decision-making structure. Differences in the perceptions of faculty and administrators occurred for the actual benefits of merger on degree programs; the potential and actual benefits of merger on student demand, the actual benefits to personnel, and the potential and actual benefits of political factors. (Author/SW)

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INTRA-INSTITUTIONAL MERGERS OF ACADEMIC
UNITS: GROWTH IN THE CONTEXT OF
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By

Christine Z. Somerville

Research Paper Presented at the annual meeting,
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INTRA-INSTITUTIONAL MERGERS OF ACADEMIC UNITS:

GROWTH IN THE CONTEXT OF DECLINE

This study was designed to identify common variables which can be isolated in order to explain mergers of academic units within universities and to identify those variables associated with the potential and actual benefits of the mergers as perceived by faculty and administrators.

Central tendencies were used to compute the similarities and differences in the external and internal environmental conditions before and after the mergers. The external conditions were defined as exogenous variables beyond the direct control of the university administrators and consisted of student demand for programs and directives from governing/coordinating boards. The internal variables were controllable by the administration and consisted of: degree programs, economic conditions, student demand for programs, personnel and political factors. Four multivariate analysis of variance tests were used to compute the relationship between faculty and administrators perceptions of the mergers for the variable sets: degree program, student demand, personnel and political factors.

The findings showed similarities in the political and educational conditions prior to the mergers. Differences existed in the student demand for programs. The economic conditions of the units involved were in need of improvement. The mergers were regarded as a way to reorganize personnel and changes in personnel following the mergers varied among the universities.

It was concluded that the single most common impetus for merger was the economic conditions of the units involved. The process of merger implementation was similar among the participating institutions; and the mergers resulted in a more centralized decision-making structure. In addition, differences in the perceptions of faculty and administrators occurred for the actual benefits of merger on degree programs; the potential and actual benefits of merger on student demand; the actual benefits to personnel; and the potential and actual benefits of political factors.

Introduction

Growth has characterized higher education for as long as it has existed. When resources were in abundance academic programs were expanded through the development of new departments and greater differentiation among academic specialities (Blau, 1973). With the onset of decline educational administrators have sought ways to maintain the sizes of their units as well as budgets by emphasizing more efficient utilization of resources and the elimination of units which are not economically justifiable. Efficiency can be increased through merger which Hennessey (1966) refers to as horizontal diversification: "often excess facilities can be eliminated, personnel costs reduced, or duplicative activities ...can be combined with significant cost savings." The advantages of merger in the private sector have been diversification in previously unexplored markets, better utilization of spare resources, economies of scale, maintenance of size, acquisition of new skills and the softened competition for limited resources. The impetus to merge has been that "buying is cheaper than building," (Drucker, 1981).

Academic mergers between institutions have realized some similar benefits: expansion, financial improvements, enrollment increases and the improved quality of instructional programs (Millett, 1976; Chambers, 1980). Historically, academic mergers were primarily motivated by financial stress and often resulted in one institution acquiring another. Once the merger of boards and administrative structures of two separate institutions was carried out the merger of units within the institution began. Within institutional mergers are not necessarily triggered by inter-institutional mergers. Institutional reorganizations have been an effective response strategy for reversing declines (Rodekohr, 1975; Cohen, 1982).

If in fact "buying is cheaper than building," then merging must be more economical than starting a new department. Programs can be more easily renovated in accordance with student shifts if the resources have not been eliminated. Mergers are one way in which the positive effects of growth can be realized.

Universities and college administrators will continue to be faced with difficult management decisions throughout the 1980s.

If institutional reorganizations prove to be effective in adapting to the problems facing higher education, then understanding the nature of various reorganization plans will be of considerable value. Mergers of academic subunits may prove to be a more reasonable response to decline than other more permanent changes such as program elimination or the closing of an entire college within the institution. This study represents the first systematic inquiry of the factors relevant to merging within a single institution. The purpose was to identify variables common among a sample of institutions that experienced subunit mergers which appear to explain the mergers and to identify any benefits of the mergers.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample in this study consisted of eighteen, four years doctoral degree granting universities throughout the United States. All participating institutions were UCEA-member universities. Sixteen of the universities were public; two were private. Respondents included faculty, deans, department chairpersons, and central administrators. The central administrators were the chief officers representing academic affairs, fiscal/business affairs, personnel services and presidents. The total sample was 451 respondents consisting of 390 faculty and 61 administrators.

Instrumentation

Two separate survey instruments were developed for administrators and faculty respondents. The administrator survey provided information about the internal and external environmental conditions which existed before and after the mergers took place. The external environmental conditions were defined as exogenous variables beyond the direct control of the university administrators. Internal environmental conditions were endogenous variables which could be controlled by the administrative process. The exogenous variables consisted of student demand for programs and directives from governing/coordinating boards. The endogenous variables included: degree programs, economic conditions, student demand for programs, personnel, and political factors. The

administrative respondents also provided information regarding the process of merger implementation and their perceptions of actual and potential benefits of the mergers for five separate variable sets: degree programs, economics, student demand, personnel and political factors. The items included in the instrument were selected as a result of an extensive literature review and were judged by a panel of experts to possess construct validity.

Faculty survey instruments were designed to obtain only the perceptions of respondents about the potential and actual benefits of the mergers for the same five variable sets included in the administrator surveys.

DATA ANALYSIS

Central tendencies were computed for all administrative responses to survey items about the institutional conditions before and after the mergers and items relating to the process of implementing the mergers. These analyses yielded information about the similarities and differences among the eighteen intra-institutional mergers. Central tendencies were also computed for the faculty and administrative perceptions of the actual and potential benefits of the mergers on degree programs, fiscal health, student demand for degree programs, changes in personnel and political factors associated with the decision to merge and the outcomes of the mergers.

^{Four}
~~Three~~ multivariate analysis of variance tests were computed for the data on administrative and faculty perceptions of the mergers. the findings yielded information about differences between the two respondent groups in regard to perceived motivations for merger as well as the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the mergers.

FINDINGS

Pre Merger Conditions

Seven of the nine pre merger variables appeared to be unrelated to or related minimally to the mergers. The desire to become accredited accounted for one of the mergers, and one institutional merger was facilitated by a program cost study which had been conducted by the governing/coordinating board. With this one exception the mergers

were not motivated by pressure external to the institutions.

It appeared that declining enrollment conditions may have contributed to the decision to merge. Fifty-two percent of the institutions experienced enrollment declined in the units involved in the merger and forty-one percent reported that internal allocations were on the basis of enrollments. Among the factors studied the relationship between enrollments and economics had the greatest potential for contributing to the merger decisions.

Post Merger Conditions

The findings on the post merger conditions included data representing four variable sets: personnel, student demand, economics and degree programs. The changes in these variables resulting from the mergers can be summarized as follows: Fifty-three percent of the universities indicated that faculty positions as a whole decreased. Twenty-nine percent remained constant and only twelve percent increased. Although the changes in part-time faculty were less severe than for faculty as a whole the findings were similar. Forty-one percent reported a decrease, thirty-five percent remained constant and eighteen percent increased. Tenured faculty were fairly stable. Sixty-four percent of the sample remained constant compared to eighteen percent which experienced a decrease and twelve percent an increase. It was concluded that the mergers were not simply a consolidation of administrative structures of two units but rather a retrenching process whereby some attempt was made to cut back faculty positions.

Administrative positions and support staff were less subject to change. Fifty-two percent of the institutions had no change in administrative positions; thirty-five percent experienced a decrease and only six percent increased. The figures were similar for support staff: fifty-nine percent reported no change; thirty-five percent decreased. None of the universities increased support staff. The findings for support staff were unexpected. One possible explanation for the high rate of "no change" may be that the elimination of support staff due to civil service protections may be more difficult than for faculty and administrators. Retrenching faculty was more common than retrenching administrators or support staff. Student/faculty

ratios did not change for most institutions. This finding can be accounted for by the continued decline in enrollments which followed the mergers. Fifty-three percent of the sample experienced decline in the newly merged unit following the mergers; thirty-five percent stabilized and only one institution experienced an increase.

Financial changes following the mergers varied. For forty-one percent of the institutions the total budget of the units remained constant; thirty-five percent had a decrease and eighteen percent had increases. The greatest similarity among institutions was in the area of degree programs following the mergers. Seventy-one percent had no change; eighteen percent became more specialized and only one institution had its programs become more generalized.

Merger Implementation

The distribution of mergers over a ten year period evidenced a growth in the occurrence of mergers particularly within the last two years (1981 and 1982). This finding is consistent with the expectation that as universities seek greater efficiency, economies of scale will be found in growth within academic units.

The process of merger implementation was similar among the participating universities. Generally, the dean of the unit which experienced the merger was the one initiating it. The dean was also the only person commonly reported as being involved in the decision to merge. Other persons involved were department chairpersons and faculty members. Among the reasons for selecting a particular unit for merger the two responses which were most common among the universities were (1) similarity of programs (9 institutions) and (2) to equalize unit sizes (5 institutions).

Prior to implementation most institutions spent time designing the merger (82%). Once the mergers were first discussed an ad hoc task force was appointed to study the desirability of a merger. (82%). Seventy-seven percent consolidated the support staff. Seventy-one percent of the universities informed the faculty about the merger prior to the change in order to build support for the merger; and eighty-eight percent publically announced the merger before it occurred; twelve percent after.

The reaction of the persons involved in the mergers were similar to the findings in Millett's study. Seventy-seven percent of the universities reported faculty opposition while only twelve percent reported administrative resistance. Once the mergers occurred, faculty and administrators supported it.

FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS OF MERGER

Mergers and Degree Programs

A summary of findings are presented in the following table. The scale was a five point Likert with 1 equals strongly agree and 5 equals strongly disagree.

	SA	A	U	D	SD	TOTAL N
Prior to the merger:						
need to improve programs	25%	46%	10%	10%	6%	451
desire to increase offerings	10%	39%	19%	21%	7%	451
need to develop innovative programs	23%	48%	10%	10%	4%	451
need to diversify	11%	27%	21%	28%	7%	451
As a result of the merger:						
programs improved	8%	22%	27%	26%	12%	451
meeting needs of students	7%	18%	31%	22%	14%	451
responding to manpower needs	4%	15%	35%	23%	15%	451
increased offerings cost efficiently	9%	24%	21%	24%	16%	451
more innovative programs	4%	20%	24%	28%	17%	451
programs more diversified	6%	17%	24%	30%	16%	451

There was a perceived need to improve instructional programs prior to the mergers (71% agreed) and to develop innovative programs (71% agreed). There was to a lesser extent a perceived desire to increase programs offerings (49% agreed). Respondents as a whole perceived little benefit of the mergers in degree programs. The most positive benefit appeared to be in program offerings without additional resources (34%) agreed).

A multivariate analysis of variance test revealed statistically significant differences between faculty and administrators perceptions of the actual benefits of the mergers. Post MANOVA F-tests showed that administrators perceived the benefits of the mergers as improving degree programs, more successfully meeting the needs of students and responding to manpower needs. Administrators also believed that more innovative programs were developed as a result of the mergers. Faculty perceptions were much less positive. Mean score revealed much uncertainty.

Univariate F-tests

FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS OF ACTUAL BENEFITS OF MERGER ON INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

ITEM	HYPOTH. SS	ERROR SS	HYPOTH. MS	ERROR MS	F	SIG.OF F
improved	1.15702	500.22048	1.15702	1.25684	.92058	.338
increased	2.21037	517.53963	2.21037	1.30035	1.69983	.193
innovative	.03414	460.80586	.03414	1.15780	.02949	.864
diversify	4.92325	543.11675	4.92325	1.36461	3.60779	.058
improved	22.28466	518.79284	22.28466	1.30350	17.09602	.000***
needs	22.36536	506.83214	22.36536	1.27345	17.56284	.000***
manpower	16.87022	450.30728	16.87022	1.12143	14.91060	.000***
efficient	.49257	631.26743	.49257	1.58610	.31055	.578
innovative	8.73561	519.65439	8.73561	1.30566	6.69055	.010**
diversified	.87882	541.55868	.87882	1.36070	.64586	.422

N=193, 1,398 D.F.

** p < .01

*** p < .001

The Economics of Merger

Prior to the merger units which were later acquired by another experienced budget problems. Eleven institutions reported economic problems versus five reporting no such problems. Although the findings were less conclusive for the economic variables, the following table summarizes the perceived benefits of merger on the fiscal health of

the units involved.

FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS
OF THE ECONOMICS OF MERGER

As a result of the merger the unit:	Has had an increase in its budget	Has maintained its budget		Has had a decrease in its budget	TOTAL N	
	8%	23%		16%	451	
	SA	A	U	D	SD	
resources utilized more efficiently	3%	25%	13%	11%	4%	451
cuts absorbed with minimal disruption	2%	17%	17%	14%	4%	451
administrative costs reduced	3%	17%	12%	15%	8%	451
one unit supports another	4%	16%	19%	12%	4%	451
economic savings benefitted entire university	2%	6%	22%	16%	8%	451
decline less harmful	3%	22%	17%	8%	4%	451

The most positively perceived economic benefits of the mergers were: more efficient utilization of resources; the impact of reduced resources and declining enrollments was less harmful due to the mergers; and budgetary cuts were absorbed with minimal disruption.

The differences in the perception that the merger helped reduce administrative costs are likely to be accounted for in part by group membership. Faculty perceptions of the merger suggested that administrative costs had not reduced as a result of the mergers (25% agreed). However, the perceptions were opposite among administrators (26% disagreed).

Student Demand and Mergers

There appeared to be little expectation that the merger would increase student enrollment (44% ^{disagreed} ~~agreed with the positive statement~~); and the perceptions of the effect merger had on enrollment was consistent with these expectations (5% ^U did not believe the merger reversed or slowed the declines). The post MANOVA F-tests showed a significant difference

in the perceived potential benefit of mergers in attracting a wider variety of student existed between faculty and administrator respondents ($F= 5.54523$, $N=204$, $1,413$ D.F. $p < .019$). Administrators believed the merger would result in attracting a wider variety of students whereas faculty had little expectation of such a benefit (44% of the administrator agreed; 31% of the faculty agreed).

Personnel and Mergers

The findings on the potential and actual benefits the mergers had on personnel were revealing. Fifty-percent of the respondents indicated that the mergers were a way in which to reassign faculty to high demand courses in order to minimize retrenchment. This figure was striking when compared to the five percent who believed the mergers were a way to increase the number of faculty and the twelve percent who believed it eliminated faculty. The perceived potential effects of merger on administrative positions was equally impressive. Fifty-six percent of the respondents believed the mergers to be a way to eliminate administrative positions. Changes in faculty assignments as a result of the mergers were mixed. Fifty-nine percent were unaffected; twenty-three percent had expanded assignments while only seven percent reduced their assignments. This finding appeared to be consistent with the seventy-one percent of the institutions which had no change in degree programs following the mergers.

Politics of Merger

As indicated in the summary table for political factors affecting the mergers the most revealing findings were the centralization of decision making following the mergers, the perceived need to become more influential on campus (45% agreed), and the perceived need to improve the internal management of the unit.

FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THE
POLITICS OF MERGER

	SA	A	U	D	SD	TOTAL N
Prior to merger there was a: need to centralize decision making	7%	24%	21%	27%	16%	451

FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THE
POLITICS OF MERGER (continued)

	SA	A	U	D	SD	TOTAL N
Prior to the merger there was a:						
need to become more influential	9%	36%	23%	20%	6%	451
need to improve internal management	17%	45%	15%	13%	5%	451
merger was last-ditch effort to save dying unit	4%	6%	13%	30%	41%	451
Since merger:						
decision making is more centralized	14%	42%	16%	13%	8%	451
unit is more influential	3%	20%	33%	28%	10%	451
management improved	5%	27%	25%	20%	16%	451
A unit was not eliminated	3%	20%	24%	24%	18%	451
competition for resources softened	0	19%	28%	31%	15%	451
emphasis on unit needs	1%	14%	30%	30%	18%	451
merger was rational management strategy	8%	37%	22%	16%	10%	451
merger was politically rational strategy	10%	42%	20%	11%	6%	451
difficult to implement	20%	30%	10%	26%	8%	451
As result of merger:	All units benefitted		One unit benefitted at the expense of another		The merger was of little benefit	
	35%		20%		32%	

Among the political factors which had potential effects on the merger decision there is strong evidence that "influence" and "internal management" most affected the decision. The actual benefits of the mergers in terms of political factors were found to be somewhat inconclusive.

The post MANOVA F-tests indicated a statistically significant difference between faculty and administrators perceptions of the actual benefits. Administrators tended to perceive the benefits of the mergers more positively than did faculty for each of the significant differences.

Univariate F-tests
FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THE
POLITICS OF MERGER

ITEM	HYPOTH.SS	ERROR SS	HYPOTH.MS	ERROR MS	F	SIG. OF F
centralized	2.06524	511.42250	2.06524	1.40116	1.47395	.226
influential	4.56304	418.75031	4.56304	1.14726	3.97733	.047*
improved	.27079	422.23602	.27079	1.15581	.23408	.629
last effort	7.73130	437.87633	7.73130	1.19966	6.44457	.012*
centralized	3.20594	482.63057	3.20594	1.32228	2.42456	.120
influential	1.75275	358.50883	1.75275	.98222	1.78448	.182
improved	10.01551	485.70656	10.01551	1.33070	7.52648	.006*
elimination	.67030	473.53678	.67030	1.29736	.51666	.473
competition	1.53277	372.17840	1.53277	1.01967	1.50321	.221
unit needs	5.72363	361.60062	5.72363	.99069	5.77744	.017*
rational man.	14.62528	460.86246	14.62528	1.26264	11.58313	.001***
political	3.63231	440.48757	3.63231	1.20682	3.00983	.084
difficult	9.61879	615.41118	9.61879	1.68606	5.70490	.017*

N=175, 1,365 D.F.

* p < .05

*** p < .001

CONCLUSIONS

Intra-institutional mergers appear to be occurring with greater frequency. And it is likely that this trend will continue throughout the 1980s. Because most of the mergers studied in this investigation were current the long-term effects of the mergers remain unknown. One of the common responses to many of the unanswered items was that it was too early to determine the effects. In the short run, there are clearly potential economic benefits to be realized from merging units within an institution. The immediate changes associated with the mergers are not programmatic in nature but rather tend to be related to increasing the institution's ability to manage its resources in such a way as to minimize the stress of declining enrollments. It appears that intra-institutional mergers

create greater budgetary flexibility which may then facilitate more efficient utilization of the resources available. It is likely that economic flexibility is a necessary condition for programmatic diversity and flexibility to occur. If this in fact is true then the benefits of merger on instructional programs should occur at a later stage of adjustment to the merger. Similarly, once programmatic diversity and variety have increased the student demand for programs may change. Subsequent increases in enrollments may follow.

The challenges facing higher education are considerable. Survival will depend in part on maintaining whatever resources are already available to the institutions. The extent to which university administrators are successful in maintaining economic stability will in part depend upon how efficiently the resources are being utilized. Mergers within institutions can increase efficiency and provide the benefits of growth in the context of decline.

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